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Resilience and the public's role in reacting to disaster were among the topics discussed as more than 25 leading homeland security practitioners and academics gathered at the Center for Homeland Defense and Security (CHDS) Nov. 9-10 for the 2nd Annual Lacy E. Suiter Policy Forum.

Those attending represented federal, state and local government professionals as well as executives from the private sector.

The forum is named in honor of the late Lacy E. Suiter, the former director of executive education programs at CHDS and a much-lauded figure in the world of homeland security who encouraged debate in the quest to craft better policy.



"The Lacy E. Suiter Policy Forum provides an excellent venue for emergency management professionals to discuss emerging issues and policy concerns," said CHDS Director Glen Woodbury. "I was pleased with the well-rounded discussions this year's forum produced as they were the kinds of debate Lacy would have encouraged. We at CHDS look forward to hosting this event for years to come."

Participants said that an important feature of the forum is that it provides a venue to debate emerging issues in homeland security without constraint.

"It's important from time to time to sit down and discuss the big issues beyond day-to-day management," said Chuck Eaneff, Deputy Director, Law Enforcement, Office of the Administrator, FEMA. "Everyday, we're solving today's problems. We need to take time to talk about what will the field of emergency management look like in 25 years."

Tim Manning, Deputy Administrator of National Preparedness, FEMA, agreed.

"The importance (of the forum) is bringing together a diverse group of thinkers from across the homeland security and emergency management fields to share innovative ideas," he said. "It is critical to the advancement of the profession."

Among the issues discussed was the ongoing debate of how to delineate the roles of federal, state and local governments when it comes to response, resilience and recovery, said Mike Byrne, Senior Vice President of ICF International Consulting.

"We have to answer that question," Byrne said. "This one of the few places where you can discuss an issue like that and end up coming away with answers."

Presentations during the forum included: "The Fundamental Basis for the Persistence of Myths About Public Behavior in Disasters" by Dennis Miletic; "Public Choice and Disaster Recovery" by Sam Clovis; "Natural Security: What Can We Learn From Nature For Security In Society?" by Rafe Sagarin; and "Complexity and Emergency Management" by Christopher Bellavita.

The topics are more than academic; they also speak to real-world practices.

Subjects such as how the public reacts to disaster are of value to both government and private-sector practitioners.

The myth is that the public is thrown into hysterics during catastrophic event, though evidence shows people who survive catastrophe are likely to render aid to others.

" It goes to the importance that we've been placing on disaster survivors as being responders; the vast majority of initial assistance will be from people who just lived through it (a disaster)," Manning said.

While the topic homeland security has been synonymous with government, the academic discipline applies equally to the private sector.

" We face the same issues, regardless of whether we're responsible for a federal entity, a state entity, a local entity or the private sector," said Bryan Koon, Director of Emergency Management for Wal-Mart Stores Inc. " All of us have things that we worry about. For us (Wal-Mart), the scope is the same as it is for many of these people."

Koon cited as an example the company's system that alerts store managers to tornado warnings.

" We want to craft those messages so they create the desired response, just as a state emergency manager would," he said. " Our end goals are the same to protect the lives of our citizens and restore our operations to normalcy."

The forum sparks the kind of debate Suiter was known to appreciate and encourage.

" He would throw out the grenades, and we would argue about it, said Byrnes, who counts Suiter among his mentors. " This was the type of thing he encouraged."

For four decades Suiter led emergency management operations on both the state and federal level. He spent 30 years with the Tennessee Emergency Management Agency, serving as Director of that agency from 1982 to 1994. He moved on to the Federal Emergency Management Agency in 1994, where he served as Director of the Office of Policy, Assessment and Regional Operations.

Suiter was appointed by President Bill Clinton in 1996 to serve as Executive Associate Director for response and recovery at FEMA. He was retained in that position by President George W. Bush and retired from FEMA in late 2001 before coming to CHDS.

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